



# Friends of Cathedral Music

Safeguarding a priceless heritage

## News from

the FCM Diocesan Representatives for

Ripon and Leeds

Newsletter No. 4

EASTER 2012

Welcome to the Easter edition of our new FCM newsletter. We hope you will enjoy reading it, and find much to interest you. We are especially grateful to Thomas Leech for his stimulating article.

## THOMAS LEECH WRITES ABOUT HIS NEW APPOINTMENT AT LEEDS

I was appointed Director of the Diocese of Leeds' Schools Singing Programme in January, following Chris McElroy's departure for Liverpool Metropolitan Cathedral.

A casual glance at our website's staff page might suggest that we struggle to fill our time, such is the size of the Diocesan Music Department. A week into the job, I was left under no illusion – despite being one of the largest cathedral music departments in the country, we work at absolute capacity. Fortunately, the team here is excellent, with an impressively wide range of skills, and admirable flexibility. My role as Director of the Schools Singing Programme combines serious management responsibilities with the expectation of musical excellence, both as a choral director and organist. Our schools programme is arguably the *raison d'être* of the department, delivering long-term and sustainable singing provision to thirty-nine primary schools, four secondary schools and three parishes, with five auditioned boys choirs, four auditioned girls choirs. We strive to combine musical and educational quality, putting appropriate repertoire at the heart of our schools work, engaging children in sacred and secular music, looking to meet the liturgical needs of our schools and develop the spiritual life of our singers.

My schedule is anchored around my contact time with school groups – delivering our provision to four primary schools in addition to directing Bradford Youth Choir (boys and girls), directing / playing at the cathedral and running project groups and workshops as necessary. There's

no possibility of becoming desk-bound! March has seen three Radio 4 broadcasts, and a recording of the complete choral works of Duruflé – using an altogether different skill set to playing pitch matching games with a Y3 class...

When I am at my desk or – almost as frequently – drinking too much coffee in order to use free wifi somewhere between rehearsals I'm making sure the everyday structure of the programme is working smoothly, trying to support staff through observation and feedback, keeping in contact with headteachers, heads of music and music coordinators and looking at how we develop in the future – be this next term or in five years' time. Planning rehearsals and development of my school groups and youth choirs is as important – every minute seems to count at the moment!

I squeeze in a small amount of freelance work, enjoying the honour of following in the footsteps of far greater musicians than I as Musical Director of Bradford Festival Choral Society, and retaining some residual ability to play the organ.

It's a privilege and a challenge to have responsibility for what is still, despite popular familiarity with SingUp and



TOM LEECH

PHOTO: BEBN

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Gareth Malone, a radical commitment to children's singing at the core of our mission. I hope that under my direction the Schools Programme will build on the superb foundations laid by Chris McElroy and make a continuing contribution to the development of Catholic choral music.

A longer article on the work of the Diocesan Music Department appears in the next edition of *Cathedral Music*.